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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Swearing-In of Shimon Peres as President of Israel

Key stories in the media:

The media reported that today President Bush will give a special address on the Middle East, which is expected to focus on the

Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process. Ha'aretz quoted a senior Israeli political source who was briefed in advance about the speech as saying that it will express a plan for "activism" on the part of the Bush administration. Bush's tone is meant to express his approval of the formation of a new PA government under Salam Fayyad, as well as the appointment of former British prime minister Tony Blair as the Quartet's coordinator. The speech is also intended to reiterate President Bush's commitment to a two-state solution, and will offer American support to PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas. In addition to offering new ideas for progress, it is also expected to include several demands to Israel. Ha'aretz quoted the senior political source as saying on Sunday: "In the past, it had been clear who the good guys and the bad guys were, and so long as Yasser Arafat and [later] Hamas were in power in the PA," that was the case. "Now, Bush needs to relate to the two sides as equals," the source added. Yediot reported that on Sunday senior GOI sources expressed their concern that President Bush's speech will include contents that are uneasy for Israel. However, the daily quoted Olmert associates as saying that the President's outline will not impose anything on the sides, and that Bush's speech will be balanced. The President's speech will be made several hours after PM Ehud Olmert hosts Abbas at his official residence in Jerusalem. Ha'aretz expects the President to make reference to it, as well as to the package of measures Israel has undertaken to bolster Abbas and the Fayyad government. These include the release of prisoners, amnesty to fugitive Fatah militants, and entry permits to veteran PLO leaders. Leading media reported that on Sunday the PA received a shipment of weapons from Jordan with Israel's approval.

On Sunday major media reported that in a move aimed at helping PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas gain approval of the new PA government, PM Olmert will approve allowing Nayef Hawatmeh, the Damascus-based leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), to travel to Ramallah on Wednesday to participate in a meeting of the PLO's general assembly. One of the DFLP's most notorious attacks was the raid on a school in Ma'alot in 1974, in which 26 people, most of them children, were killed. On Sunday Maariv and other media reported that Israel also allowed the return of Farouk Kaddoumi (Abu-Lutuf), Fatah's secretary and the head of the PLO's political wing. Kaddoumi is considered one of the strongest opponents in the top echelon of the movement to the Oslo agreements. Over the weekend the media reported that Israel has agreed to stop pursuing dozens of Fatah gunmen in the West Bank as part of an effort to boost Chairman Abbas.

All media highlighted the swearing-in of Shimon Peres as ninth President of Israel. The media quoted Peres as saying in his inaugural address to "devote myself to unifying" the nation. The Jerusalem Post bannered: "Dreaming of Peace, Peres Sworn In as President." Leading media quoted Peres as saying in an interview with AP: "We have to get rid of the territories." Yediot and Makor Rishon-Hatzofe noted the anger of right-wing politicians over Peres's remarks. Maariv reported that Peres will attempt to revive the "London Agreement" that he signed with the late King Hussein of Jordan in 1987, according to which Jordan would rule the West Bank.

All media quoted French FM Bernard Kouchner as saying on Sunday that the two IDF soldiers abducted by Hizbullah last year are apparently alive, and that negotiations for their release are being conducted via the UN. He was speaking at a press conference marking the close of two days of talks on the future of Lebanon that were held in the town of La Celle Saint-Cloud west of Paris. The conference was attended by representatives of Hizbullah and the Western-backed government of Lebanese PM Fouad Siniora. Israel Radio cited a denial by a Hizbullah source. Yediot quoted diplomatic sources in Jerusalem as saying that this is not the first time Hizbullah is making such statements about the abductees, and that it should back them up with evidence.

Leading media reported that a "senior Iranian official in Damascus" told the Qatari newspaper Al-Watan that Iran has a map of 600 targets deep inside Israel against which the Iranian Army's General Staff is prepared to launch missiles in case of a US or Israeli offensive against Iran.

Maariv noted that Olmert and Lebanese politician Sa'ad Hariri, the son of the assassinated former Lebanese PM Rafiq Hariri, visited Amman at the same time last Wednesday.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that on Friday businessman Dani Dayan was voted in as the Chairman of the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories.

The Jerusalem Post printed an AP wire report that Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman flew to Washington on Sunday for talks with US administration officials. The report cited disagreement between the two countries -- mostly on the issue of democracy -- as the reason for the visit.

Leading media reported that Turkey has agreed to loan to Israel for a few months the "Siloam Inscription" from the First Temple period, which the Ottoman authorities brought to Istanbul in the early 20th century. The artifact had been taken from the Silwan Tunnel in Jerusalem.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The influence of the president of the US consists mainly of checking a crisis, not of finding a solution."

Ha'aretz editorialized: "Olmert must keep his promise and resume negotiations on a permanent status settlement with the Palestinians and on the formation of a Palestinian state. That is the only way to truly augment Abbas's standing and that of the moderate Palestinian bloc."

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "We should disengage from the Palestinian world, for better or worse, and focus only upon ourselves."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "[The Palestinians] must choose whether to allow the Islamification of Gaza to spread to the West Bank, or to move in the opposite direction, toward peace with Israel."

Block Quotes:

I. "An Envoy, Not a Messiah"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (7/16): "The next president of the United States will operate in the narrow space, barely a crack, between the pole of 'practical idealism,' a term coined by incumbent US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and that of 'realistic

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idealism,' which is how former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright described her recommended foreign policy. The new policy will not overturn US President George W. Bush's decision to try to change the face of the Middle East, but it will seek to be more flexible in adapting to a day-to-day reality that makes it difficult to realize such subversive visions.... The influence of the president of the US consists mainly of checking a crisis, not of finding a solution.... Rhetoric aside, the arena of Israeli-Arab peace will remain of secondary importance, and will be solved only in the unlikely case of a local decision to break the ice at one fell swoop, as Egyptian president Anwar Sadat did, or, in a vastly different way, Yasser Arafat. Meanwhile, an envoy will arrive, but not a Messiah."

II. "Bolstering the Palestinian Public"

Ha'aretz editorialized (7/16): "Gestures [made by Ehud Olmert] show that he is willing to take a controlled political risk vis-a-vis the right-wing bloc in an attempt to express support for Abbas and his followers in the West Bank. But this is not enough.... Even though Olmert is meeting with the PA Chairman, the Prime Minister's moves will produce no discernible change in the lives of the inhabitants

of the territories. In order to 'bolster Abbas's standing,' the Palestinian public must see that the chairman's leadership is improving their lives, not just promoting Fatah's interests in the West Bank. The gestures must not be restricted to symbolic moves. Olmert must keep his promise and resume negotiations on a permanent status settlement with the Palestinians and on the formation of a Palestinian state. That is the only way to truly augment Abbas's standing and that of the moderate Palestinian bloc..... [Similarly,] the push which the Quartet will give the peace process will be embodied in launching former UK prime minister Tony Blair's mission to the Middle East as the organization's envoy. It will provide significant international backing for Olmert and Abbas's efforts, and it will heighten the recognition that the current opportunity, unlike others before it, must not be squandered."

III. "Back to the Illusions of Oslo?"

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (7/15): "True, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert wants to bolster Fatah and the nationalist stream versus Hamas, but those people also use terrorism against Israel.... For ... released prisoners, terrorism is the way to earn a living. It is their way of life, their dignity and their self definition. Moreover, anyone who is released in the framework of a deal must prove that he has not changed, must prove his status anew, and the way to do this is terrorism against Israel. It is possible that the Israeli government still has not come to understand that disengagement is what is needed here, since all our involvement in the Palestinian arena always ends with a terrible uproar. The things that we think will bolster Abu Mazen usually weaken him, and vice versa.... What, have we returned to the delusional years of Oslo? Those are dreams whose time has long since passed, and the Israeli government should spare itself the self-deception, the decline and the disappointment that follows that, once everything blows up in its face. It would be preferable were Israel to announce that it intends not to intervene either now or in the future in the turns of events in Palestinian life -- neither in the affairs of Hamas nor with compensating Fatah; neither with the needless assassinations in Gaza at present nor in the no less delusional prisoner releases. We should disengage from the Palestinian world, for better or worse, and focus only upon ourselves."

IV. "A Palestinian Choice"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (7/16): "Ostensibly, the Palestinian decision to adopt ... a two-state solution occurred with Arafat's renunciation of terrorism in 1988, or his signing of Oslo in 1993. In practice, Arafat went to war rather than accept a Palestinian state in 2000, and Abbas, whatever his desires and intentions, did not lift a finger to start creating a state when given the opportunity in the post-Arafat era.... The risks that Israel is taking to give the Palestinians yet another chance to take such a course should not be minimized. Based on the record, such risks are difficult if not impossible to justify. For the Palestinians, however, the stakes are even higher. They must choose whether to allow the Islamification of Gaza to spread to the West Bank, or to move in the opposite direction, toward peace with Israel. Until now, Fatah has had the luxury of pretending it had decided to make peace with Israel, while keeping the war against Israel as alive as it could. Now the price of such a policy will be abdication to Hamas, which stands for the policy of never ending the war with Israel and never building a state. There is a limit to what Israel, the US or anyone else can do to help Palestinian leaders make this choice. Ultimately, it is their own. They must decide if they want the state they claim to have been fighting for, or not. If so, they will have to begin waging peace rather than war, and will have to focus inward on building, rather than outward on attacking. As usual, all of us will lose if they make the wrong choice."

12. Swearing-In of Shimon Peres as President of Israel:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Only Peres can simultaneously be a tough security oriented politician and a peace-loving dreamer."

Senior op-ed writer Uzi Benziman wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "In no small way, Peres is responsible for the country's quagmire in the territories. His new role offers him a unique opportunity to correct that mistake."

Block Quotes:

II. "Number One at Last"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (7/16): "Olmert -- and his successors -- will regret the day [Shimon Peres] was born, because Shimon Peres does not know how to do nothing.... [Shimon Peres] is the most irremediable optimist who ever existed.... Only Peres can simultaneously be a tough security oriented politician and a peace-loving dreamer. He has been moving between those poles during his entire life, allowing settlers to build Sebastia [the first settlement] and spending entire generations in efforts to evacuate them later. He built Dimona [Israel's nuclear program] built Israel's defense establishment, and embraced Arafat."

II. "Peres Must Busy Himself With Peace"

Senior op-ed writer Uzi Benziman wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (7/16): "The tradition that took root since the time of [Israel's first president Chaim] Weizmann assigns the president only a symbolic function. All presidents avoided becoming involved in the running of the state and saw their role mostly as super-unifiers... Instead of trying to collect the leftovers, the new president is invited to stand at the head of the Israeli peace camp and utilize his post's prestige to take energetic action toward resolving the conflict with the Palestinians. This way Peres will fulfill the wishes of a significant portion of the public, and also his own. He will stray from the tradition that sanctifies the political neutrality of the president, but he will work for its benefit and instill genuine substance to his post. In no small way, Peres is responsible for the country's quagmire in the territories. His new role offers him a unique opportunity to correct that mistake. It is one thing for Peres to be at the head of a medium-sized party seeking an agreement with the Palestinians, and another to strive for such an end from the Office of the President."

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